

B-2352

Town Theatre (Empire Theatre)
311-317 West Fayette Street
Private

1911

The Town Theatre (originally Empire Theatre) is one of three remaining downtown "movie palaces" in Baltimore which started as vaudeville and burlesque houses before beginning to show movies. The Empire began to show films about 1913. Along with the addition of movies to the vaudeville shows, the Empire changed its name to the Palace. In the late 1920's and again in the mid 1930's, controversial shows led to closings. After a 10-year stint as a parking garage, the Palace interior was redesigned and it opened as a movie house, the Town, in 1947. Recently twinned, the interior serpentine wall trim of the 1947 remodeling by John J. Zink and Lucius R. White, Jr. is mostly intact.

Maryland Historical Trust

State Historic Sites Inventory Form

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic Empire Theatre; Palace Theatre

and/or common Town Theatre

2. Location

street & number 311-317 West Fayette Street ☐ not for publication

city, town Baltimore ☐ vicinity of congressional district 3rd

state Maryland county

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name JF Theatres, Inc.

street & number 17 West Pennsylvania Avenue telephone no.: 296-7570

city, town Baltimore state and zip code MD 21204

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Baltimore City Courthouse liber

street & number Fayette and Calvert Streets folio

city, town Baltimore state MD

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title Baltimore Retail District Survey

date 1980 ☒ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☒ local

depository for survey records Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation

city, town Baltimore state MD

7. Description

Survey No. B-2352

Condition

☐ excellent
☒ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date of move _____

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

SUMMARY:

The Town Theatre is a 1911 brick theater building with a Classical Revival marble facade located on the south side of West Fayette Street about halfway between North Howard and North Eutaw Streets in central Baltimore, Maryland. The main elevation remains almost as built, with a three-bay facade defined by rusticated piers framing a central pavilion with engaged Ionic columns topped by a peaked parapet with a tablet motif. Former window openings on both the piers and the pavilion have been filled in. The street level and marquee are the parts most altered. The marquee is a semi-circular steel and glass structure extending to the street curb at its widest part. A central vertical pylon features curving streamlined elements. The street facade has four sets of modern glass doors flanking the central box office which is faced with fluted stainless steel. The interior was divided into twin auditoriums in late 1985, but much of the 1947 sculptural features remained in place.

General Description:

The Town Theatre, opening in 1911 as the Empire Theatre, had a marble Classical Revival facade with an iron and glass canopy over the wide entrance bay. Through many reopenings and remodelings, the main elements of the facade have remained largely intact. The elevation is divided into three main bays with the side bays functioning as piers with bands of stylized rustication. The piers have two levels of window openings which are now filled in. The lower openings have balustrades. The upper windows in each bay has a console sill with comedy masks below. The upper part of the opening extends up through the cornice into a medallion surround.

The central bay or pavilion contains the entrance at the street level and four engaged Ionic columns above the 1947 marquee. The columns have rusticated banding on their lower shafts. The area between the columns was originally windows, but is now filled in. The bay is topped by a peaked parapet with a central tablet medallion.

The street level and marquee are the most altered parts of the facade. The side piers are painted gray-brown. The central box office is flanked by two pairs of modern glass doors. The box office is faced with fluted stainless steel. The semi-circular marquee

(see continuation sheet)

8. Significance

Survey No. B-2352

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1911 Builder/Architect Otto Simonson & W.H. McElfatrick

check: Applicable Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D
and/or

Applicable Exception: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Level of Significance: ☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

SUMMARY:

The Town Theatre (originally Empire Theatre) is one of three remaining downtown "movie palaces" in Baltimore which started as vaudeville and burlesque houses before beginning to show movies. The Empire began to show films about 1913. Along with the addition of movies to the vaudeville shows, the Empire changed its name to the Palace. In the late 1920's and again in the mid 1930's, controversial shows led to closings. After a 10-year stint as a parking garage, the Palace interior was redesigned and it opened as a movie house, the Town, in 1947. Recently twinned, the interior serpentine wall trim of the 1947 remodeling by John J. Zink and Lucius R. White, Jr. is mostly intact.

History and Support:

The Empire Theatre opened on December 25, 1911 with a burlesque and vaudeville show called "Follies of the Day". The house held 2,400 according to the design by Otto Simonson of Baltimore and W. H. McElfatrick of New York. Simonson was a prominent local architect of office buildings and schools and the partner of Theodore Wells Pietsch. The Empire cost \$400,000 and had a 70-ft. by 70-ft. proscenium opening. The backstage area had twelve dressing rooms in three tiers. Additional attractions in the theater were pool rooms on the second floor, a soda fountain on the ground floor, and a rathskeller.

In 1913, the theater's name was changed to the Palace and movies were added to the three vaudeville shows each day. Nationally known entertainers such as Joe E. Brown and Mae West played the Palace in the early 1920's, but in the late 1920's, controversial movies brought down the curtain for a time. In 1931, the Palace

(see continuation sheet)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. B-2352

Headley, R. K., Jr., Exit: A History of Movies in Baltimore, 1974.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property _____

Quadrangle name Baltimore EastQuadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References do NOT complete UTM references

A

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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification

co-terminous with lot approx. 99½ ft. x 155 ft. 9 in.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Janet Davis, Historic Preservation AnalystCommission for Historical andorganization Architectural Preservationdate April 1986street & number Rm. 606, 118 No. Howard St.telephone (301) 396-4866city or town Baltimorestate MD 21201

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
Shaw House
21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 269-2438

CONTINUATION SHEET

B-2352

Town Theatre

Section 7: Description

replaces the original iron and glass canopy. The marquee has a central pylon motif with streamlined stainless steel elements. Along the upper edge of the marquee are modern double sign panels with the theater name. These replace freestanding letters on the original marquee. The east elevation of the theater is exposed and shows the common bond stock brick structural exterior walls. An iron fire escape extends across the elevation from the balcony level.

The interior has undergone many changes over the years and the remaining features of importance date from the 1947 remodeling. These are primarily the serpentine wall panels and trim above the proscenium. Although the auditorium was twinned in late 1985, these elements remain mostly intact.

CONTINUATION SHEET

B-2352

Town Theatre

Section 8: Significance

was sold and renovated, reopening on Christmas Eve of that year. The initial success was short-lived and Minsky's strip tease shows in the mid-1930's brought police attention, to the eventual detriment of the theater. In 1937, the building became a parking garage.

In 1946, the Rappaport organization, which operated several Baltimore theaters, acquired the Palace and made extensive plans for renovation as a movie theater. The architects for the rehabilitation were John J. Zink and Lucius R. White, Jr. Zink designed more than 30 theaters in his career and had his early training with Thomas Lamb in New York while attending the Columbia School of Architecture at night. He was as much interested in acoustics and other technical aspects of theater design as in the decoration of buildings. The new theater interior had curving walls topped with serpentine moldings and free-form wall sculpture flanking the proscenium. It reopened as the Town Theatre on January 22, 1947 with "It's a Wonderful Life", attended by the show's star James Stewart.

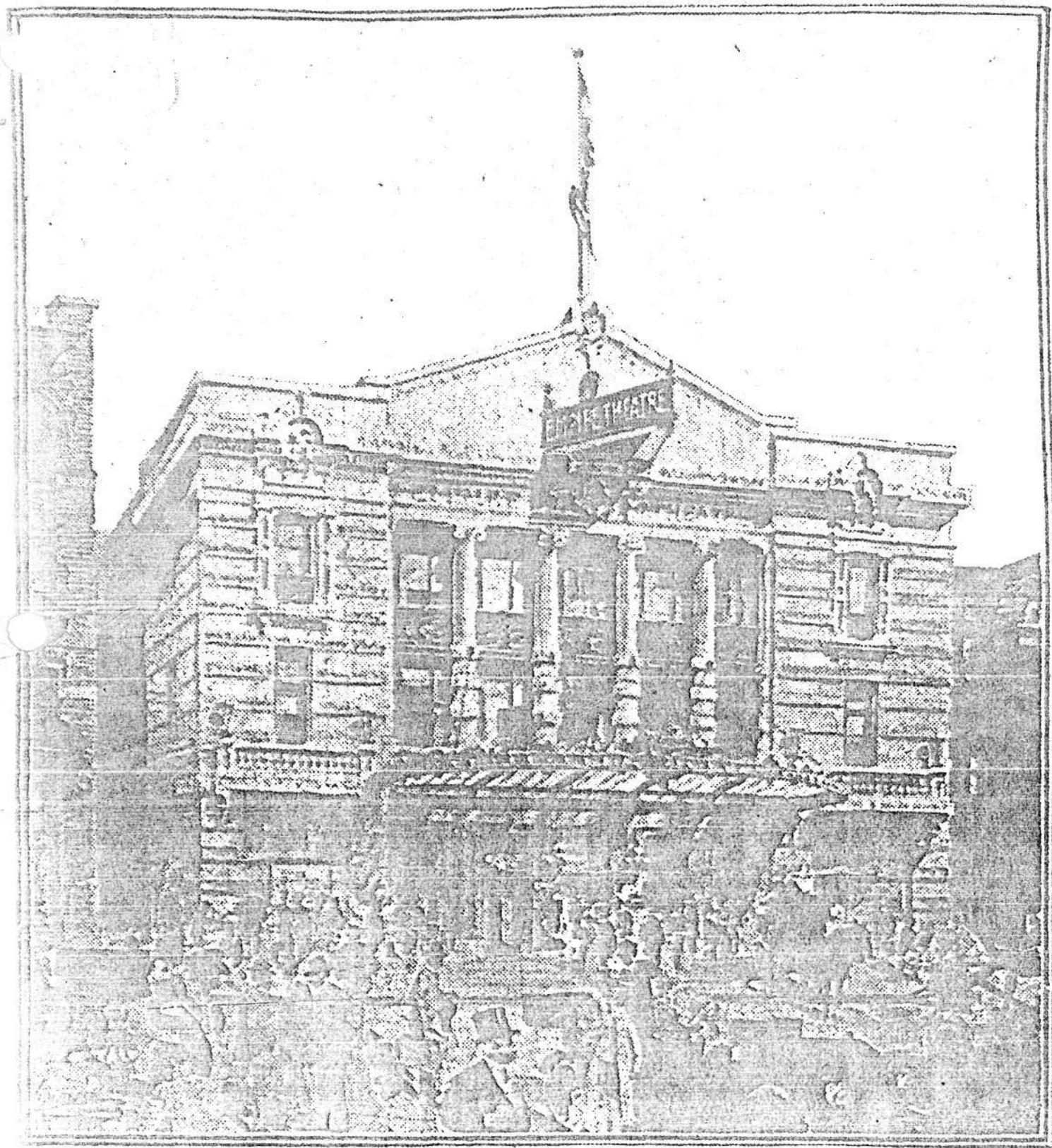
In 1953, a shoot-out on the Town's mezzanine between FBI agents and a wanted man resulted in the death of the fugitive and an agent and the wounding of two others. In spite of this melodramatic incident, the Town continued as a more or less successful theater. In late 1985, the auditorium was twinned, but Zink's interior wall treatments remained mostly intact.

...ing rations are recommended: corn-
meal, two parts; ground buckwheat, two
parts; ground oats, two parts, mixed with
or milk. Another; Barley meal, two

Q.—Where can I purchase avenarius ear-
bellineum?

A.—Send stamped envelope and this in-
formation will be sent you.

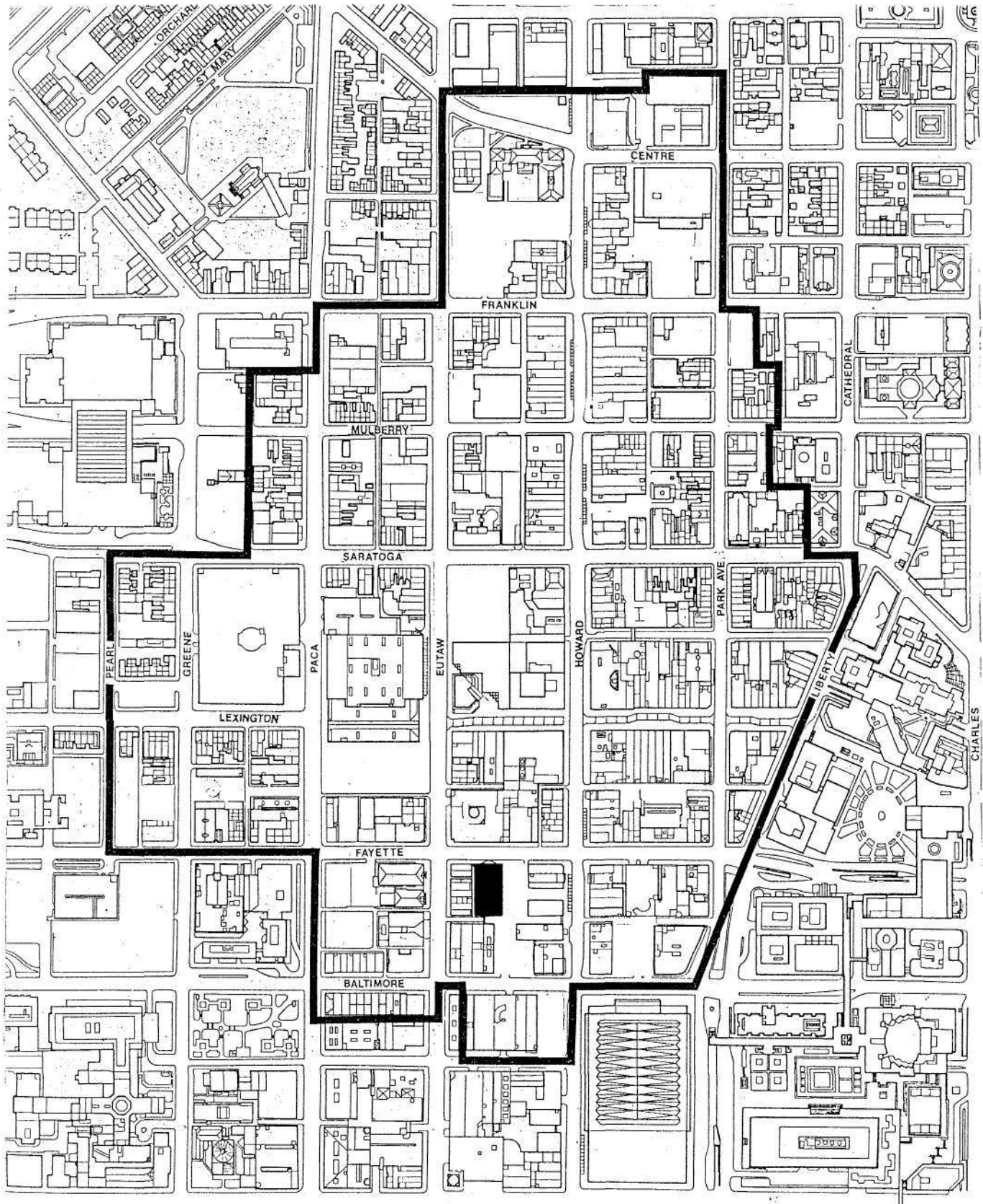
"I'm afraid not. He's one of those men
who understand exactly what their wives
are talking about when they describe what
other women wear."—*Washington Star*.



The Empire Theatre.

The New Empire Theatre, on Fayette street, near Eutaw, is progressing rapidly, and will be an addition to the list of
grandest playhouses in Baltimore.

Baltimore Sun, Dec. 1911



Baltimore Metrocenter Survey
 Market Center
 Town Theatre
 311-317 West Fayette Street
 B-2352



Maryland Historical Trust
State Historic Sites Inventory Form

Survey No. B-2352

Magi No. 0423525724

DOE yes Xno

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic The Empire Theater; the Palace Theater

and/or common The Town Theater

2. Location

street & number 311-17 W. Fayette Street not for publication

city, town Baltimore vicinity of congressional district

state Maryland county city

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<u> </u> district	<u> </u> public	<u>X</u> occupied	<u> </u> agriculture <u> </u> museum
<u>X</u> building(s)	<u>X</u> private	<u> </u> unoccupied	<u> </u> commercial <u> </u> park
<u> </u> structure	<u> </u> both	<u> </u> work in progress	<u> </u> educational <u> </u> private residence
<u> </u> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<u>X</u> entertainment <u> </u> religious
<u> </u> object	<u> </u> in process	<u>X</u> yes: restricted	<u> </u> government <u> </u> scientific
	<u> </u> being considered	<u> </u> yes: unrestricted	<u> </u> industrial <u> </u> transportation
	<u> </u> not applicable	<u> </u> no	<u> </u> military <u> </u> other:

4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name

street & number telephone no.:

city, town state and zip code

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Baltimore City Courthouse liber

street & number Calvert and Fayette Streets folio

city, town Baltimore state Maryland

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title CBD West; Maryland Historical Trust Historic Sites Survey;
Baltimore Retail District

date 1976; 1976; 1980 federal state county local

depository for survey records Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation;
Market Center Development Corporation

city, town Baltimore state Maryland

7. Description

Survey No. B-2352

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date of move _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

Summary

Built originally in 1910 as a burlesque and vaudeville theater, the Empire Theater (later renamed the Palace and then the Town) is a fine example of theatrical Beaux Arts architecture. It was built to the design of Otto C. Simonsen and W.H. McElfatrick. The interior has been greatly altered, but retains certain elements of a renovation carried out by architects John J. Zinc and Lucius R. White in the 1940s. The handsome three-story marble facade has remained largely intact. (See Figure 1.)

Exterior

The Town's exterior features a pedimented portico with four monumental engaged columns in the Ionic order inset into the central bay. The simple frieze above supports a cornice with egg and dart and dentil molding, and a pediment featuring a cartouche at its peak. The cornice is interrupted in the two outer bays by two blind bull's-eye windows with elaborately carved details including carved swags; these bull's-eye windows lie above two blind windows framed between Ionic pilasters and resting on flat sills supported by carved masks. Below each, at the second floor level, two additional blind windows surmount balustraded balconies supported by brackets. The marble walls of the top two stories are banded by projecting stone courses set with rows of medallions.

The major alterations to the exterior have been made at the ground floor, where the marquee was replaced (c. 1947) by a curving art moderne marquee. Two doorways, defined by heavily rusticated piers, remain in the end bays which flank the central entrance. However, they have been filled with masonry.

Interior

Although the Town Theatre has undergone numerous alterations, many of the spaces that create the atmosphere of an old vaudeville/movie house remain--the spacious and wide lobby, the mezzanine level, and the standee area.

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Remnants of the vibrant art moderne design attributed to architect John Zink's 1940s renovations are apparent upon entering the lobby of the Town Theatre. The large, deep lobby space moves with serpentine curves and is highlighted by amoeba-shaped windows for the showbills. The standee area has been closed off from the auditorium, and the concession stand is a more recent addition.

In the auditorium, the general sense of movement created by Zink's curved wall form has been maintained, particularly around the stage area. (See Figure 2.) A wave-like motif decorates the top of the proscenium, which may also be attributed to Zink. Curtains at present hide much of the wall surface around the stage and wing area, so it is difficult to determine if any of the original decoration or Zink's remodelings remain underneath. A look behind one of the side curtains revealed a plain wall surface. Most (if not all) of the metallic sculpture by Bach which was once integral to the 1940s design has been removed. Other important elements of Zink's design--the indirect lighting, panels of back-lighted corrugated glass, and a central path of light on the ceiling--are no longer clearly visible and may also be missing. The seating appears to be a mixture of old and new.

The balcony is reached by two sets of side flanking stairs. Along the stairway the walls flow with a curvilinear momentum. More amoeba-shaped windows for the showbills are housed on the mezzanine level. A concession stand is also located in this area. The large dressing rooms are evidently intact (although they could not be viewed during the site visit scheduled in conjunction with this project). Both the lobby and mezzanine levels have recently been painted a bright yellow, to coincide with the opening of the Town as a twin movie theater. As part of recent renovations, the balcony space is being partitioned off to create a second "twin" cinema on the second floor level.

8. Significance

Survey No. B-2352

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1910 (see below for alterations) Builder/Architect Otto Simonson & Wm. McElfattrick

check: Applicable Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

and/or

Applicable Exception: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Level of Significance: ☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

Summary

Situated at the heart of Baltimore's financial and commercial district, the Town Theatre was a central attraction on a prominent site. As part of the history of vaudeville and burlesque theaters, the Town theater is a classic example of the intense wave of popularity and the equally intense demise they experienced. Conceived by its owners, builders and architects as a theater to dazzle the public and satisfy the demands of the top vaudeville stars, the Town Theatre has lost all sense of this original vaudeville grandeur. Extensive interior alterations and remodelings are indicative of the theater's need to be one step ahead of trends in architecture, interior design and technology in order to satisfy a demanding public and survive in a competitive market. The theater's history is a guide to the initial introduction of the movie picture as second bill to the vaudeville act and finally to its outright supremacy.

The architects of the original building, Otto C. Simonsen and William H. McElfattrick, were both significant architects of their day. Simonsen was a native Baltimore architect familiar with the development and needs of the city, and McElfattrick was a New York specialist in theater design. Much of their original Beaux-Arts exterior design remains.

However, the interior of the Town has been significantly altered. John J. Zink, a recognized authority on theater design and renovations during the early to mid-20th century, was architect for the most significant interior renovation to the Town (in the 1940s). He was responsible for the design of 200 theaters in Baltimore and other parts of the United States. Some elements of his interior for the Town remain.

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Construction History

The Empire was built in 1910, at a cost of \$400,000. The Empire Circuit, one of the largest burlesque circuits in the United States, constructed it as a luxury theater. The intention of the owners was to stun the opposition with its superior surroundings, and the magnificent facilities provided for its stars.

Otto C. Simonson (1862-1922), a Baltimore architect and William H. McElfatrick (1854-1922), a designer of theater buildings in many cities, designed the original theater. During the late 19th and early 20th century, theater design was dominated by the then-in-vogue Art Nouveau style. After 1910 art nouveau had given way completely to Beaux Arts classicism. Simonson and McElfatrick use the more formal, less ornamental Beaux Arts classicism style for the design of their exterior. (See Figure 3.) Little of their interior design remains; indeed it is difficult to visualize the interior, in light of the extensive alterations and alternate uses the theater has undergone. However, the original interior colors were "a mellow green and gold. The draperies were soft rose with deep red carpets. Lighting fixtures were solid gleaming brass. Twelve dressing rooms were arranged in three tiers. The original stage was 70 feet wide by 70 feet high and 32 feet deep." ¹ No photographs of the interior were located.

In 1913, the Empire became the Palace theater. As the theater flourished in the early twenties, many of the top performers of the day appeared on the Palace stage. Exit, A History of Movies in Baltimore, names Joe E. Brown and Mae West as star attractions to the Palace. By the late twenties, burlesque had gradually lost ground and the theater fell upon difficult times. The Palace management was forced to feature other shows and hire space out for any other uses possible. Movies with questionable subject matter were featured, and the theater was used for private parties, boxing matches and bingo nights.

In 1928 the theater was sold at public auction for \$50,000, extensively renovated and reopened in 1933. It is difficult to determine the extent and the details of these renovations, and what effect they had on the interior appearance of the theater, as there appears to be no descriptions or documentation concerning the work. From the time the theater was reopened it lead a highly colorful existence. In the 1934-35 season, strip tease shows were the final degradation, which caused the closing of the theater by the police to "protect the public morals." ²

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In 1937, the theater was purchased by the Schroeder Holding Company, Inc. for \$85,000. Their original plans involved razing the theater to install a parking lot on the site. (See Attachment 1 and Figure 4.) The theater was not razed but a parking garage was apparently housed within the shell of the theater until 1946. Such extensive alternate uses very likely deteriorated or destroyed any remaining original fabric of the theater. The drastic results of one such alternate garage use for another theater is pictured in American Picture Palaces. (See Figure 4.)

Plans for renovation, and reopening the theater as a movie house were formulated in 1946. The renovations and new design for the theater were carried out by architects John J. Zink and Lucius R. White. (Although Exit names both Zink and White as architects of the renovation, the design seems mainly attributable to Zink. Exit gives no further credit to White in a lengthy description of the work done. Further, during the course of this project, little information has surfaced on White or his career.)

John Zink was a native Baltimore architect (1886-1952) who designed numerous movie houses in Baltimore. (Others include the Bridge, Patterson, Edgewood, Ambassador, Senator and Colony.) He was considered a top "moderne" architect at a time when many architects were designing in elaborate, emotional styles. Zink's designs were simple. His attentions were directed toward technical aspects of theater architecture such as clear views for all movie-goers and ideal accoustics.

Zink's work on the Palace theater's interior (Figure 5) is recreated in a vivid description in Exit:

His treatment of the new theater included indirect lighting, serpentine walls, panels of back lighted corrugated glass, and modernistic metal sculpture by Oscar Bruno Bach. The lobby was separated from the outer foyer by three pairs of solid glass doors. On either side of the doors was a metallic "garden" by Bach. The standee area featured blues and greens on the walls with pink and mulberry tones on the ceiling. The mezzanine lounge contained several more of Bach metallic gardens. In the auditorium, Zink used inward curving side walls and a central path of light on the ceiling running from the screen to the back of the auditorium to bring the screen close to the patron. Two Bach metal compositions, one on each side of the screen, were symbolic of the movie industry. The screen curtain was a shade of mulberry." 4

The newly remodeled theater opened as the Town in 1947, and featured an Art Deco marquee that spans the complete entrance to the theater. Red, gold and chrome coloring emblazoned the semicircular marquee.

In 1958 the Town theater became part of the large JF chain of movie houses. Presently it is part of a 25-year lease to Trans-Lux.

Today remaining details of Zink's work can be seen in the curved art moderne walls and other features. However, little if any of the original Simonsen and McElfatrick interior design remains. At present the theater is being converted into a two-picture movie house, it is being "twinning" by division horizontally into a ground floor and balcony level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusion of this project's research and assessment of the Town Theater's interior is that it may not contribute significantly to a National Register nomination on the entire building. The interior as it exists today may not have the integrity of design or historical association which would meet the National Register criteria. Too many remodelings appear to have marred its sense of original design and other possible significant designs.

John Zink, architect of the 1940s remodeling, was a highly regarded architect of his time. A highly intact and representative example of his work might qualify for listing on the Register. However, his design for the interior of the Town does not appear to be intact enough to stand on its own. Significant elements such as the sculpture have been removed, and later renovations have marred its integrity. In addition, it has not reached the 50 years of age generally required for listing on the National Register. Remodelings subsequent to Zink's also do not carry significant architectural or historical merit.

One note: It may be appropriate to investigate the interior of the theater a bit further. It is difficult to assess a space such as this one which is so obscured by voluminous draperies. If the location or existence of Zink's papers or drawings could be confirmed, it might be possible to determine the full extent of his work on the theater and judge the significance of its remaining elements.

A second note: It is possible--despite the lack of integrity of the building's interior--that a National Register nomination could be initiated for the entire structure to be listed on

the National Register. There is some chance that the altered state of its interior could be overridden by the building's fine extant exterior design and its historical association with early vaudeville. It is difficult to say at this point what the chances of such a nomination would be. Research currently being conducted by CHAP as part of their inventory of Baltimore's early retail core could help determine whether the building as a whole could be listed on the Register.

However, no matter what the potential is of National Register listing, it would seem appropriate to recommend that the exterior facade be preserved and protected--as an intact example of the design of the original architect, and as a classic reminder of the grandeur and essence of the vaudeville stage. The interior in its present altered condition has not yet been proven to warrant special protection.

At present the existence of the Town Theater seems to be secure for some time. Its owners are conducting interior improvements and preparing to "twin" the structure, dividing it horizontally to accommodate two movie theaters.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Headley, Robert Kirk, Jr. Exit, A History of Movies in Baltimore, p. 128.

² Ibid., p. 129.

³ "Real Estate Deals and Building News," Baltimore Sun, August 28, 1937.

⁴ Headley, p. 129.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. B-2352

(see attached)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property _____

Quadrangle name _____

Quadrangle scale _____

UTM References do NOT complete UTM references

A

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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title

organization Traceries

date February 1986

street & number 1606 20th Street, N.W., Suite 201

telephone 202/462-0333

city or town Washington

state D.C. 20009

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
Shaw House
21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 269-2438

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ARCHIVAL RESOURCES

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Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation. Vertical files.

Enoch Pratt Free Library, Maryland Room. Vertical, map and photo files; books.

Library of Congress. Maps and Geography Division.

Maryland Historical Society. Prints and Photographs Division.

Peale Museum. Prints and Photographs Collection.

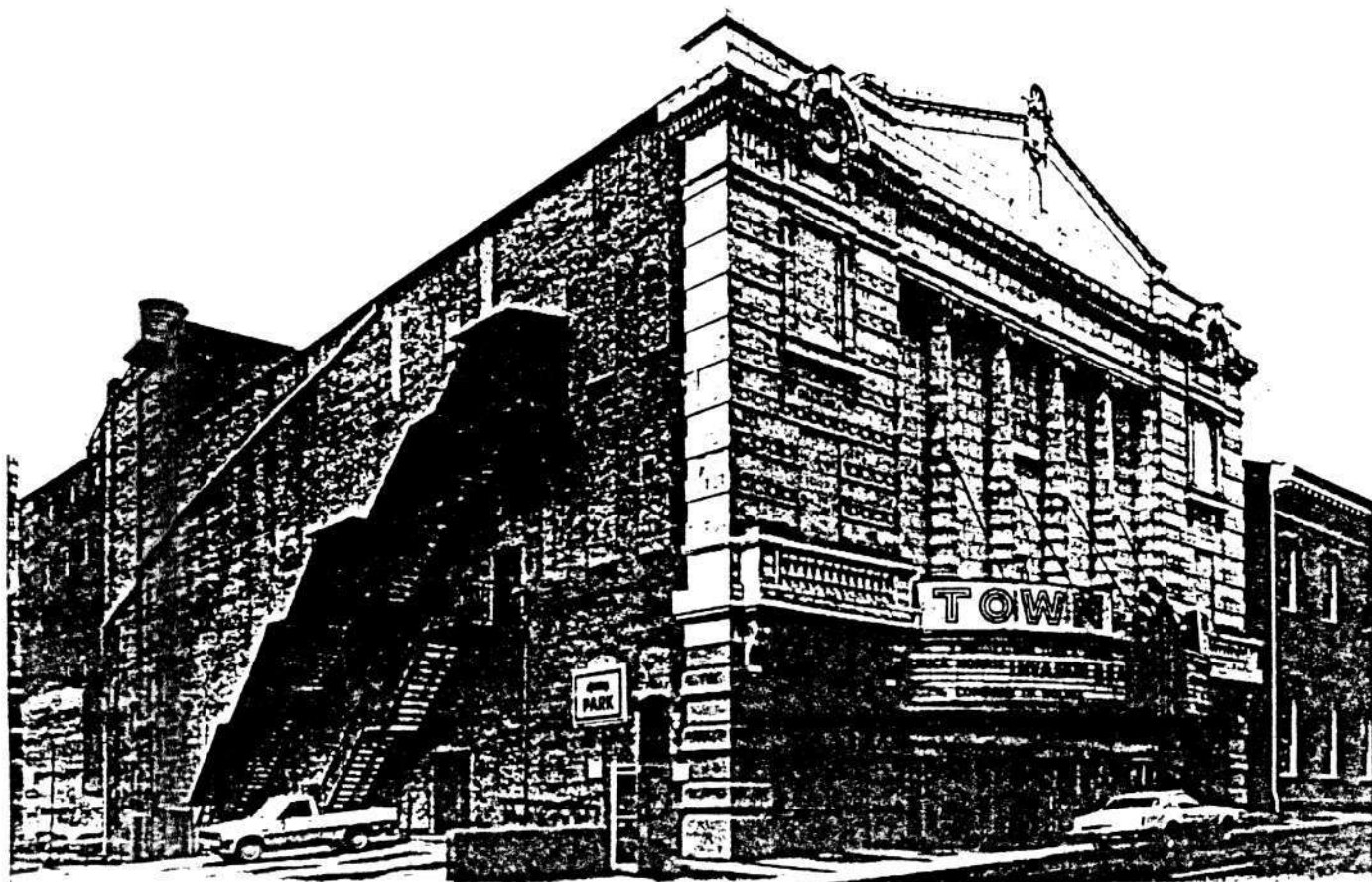


PHOTO: William Lebovich

FIGURE 1

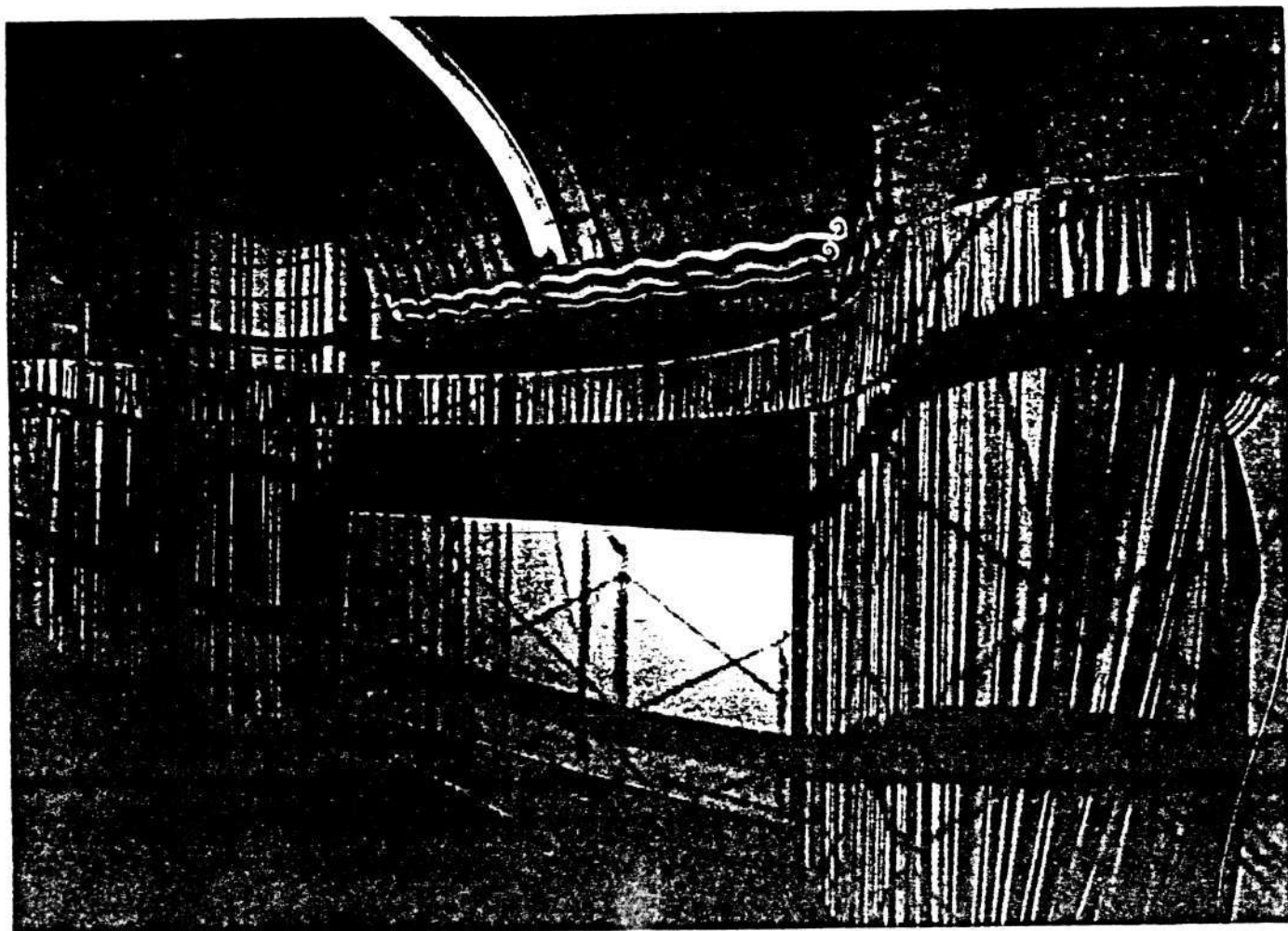
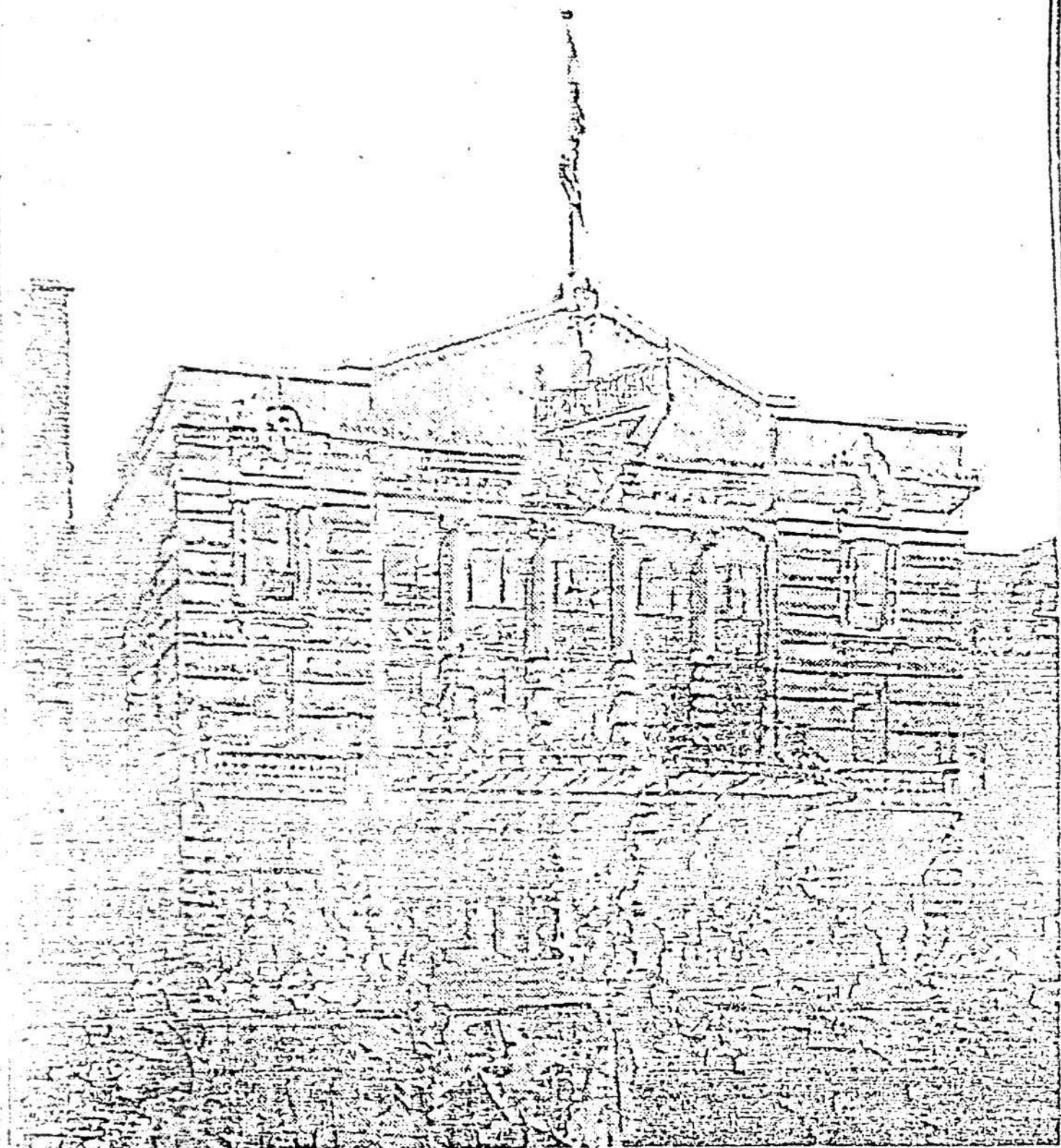


PHOTO: William Lebovich

FIGURE 2



From: Exit, A History of Movies in Baltimore

The Empire Theatre.

The New Empire Theatre, on Fayette street, near Eutaw, is progressing rapidly, and will be an addition to the list of movie palaces in Baltimore.

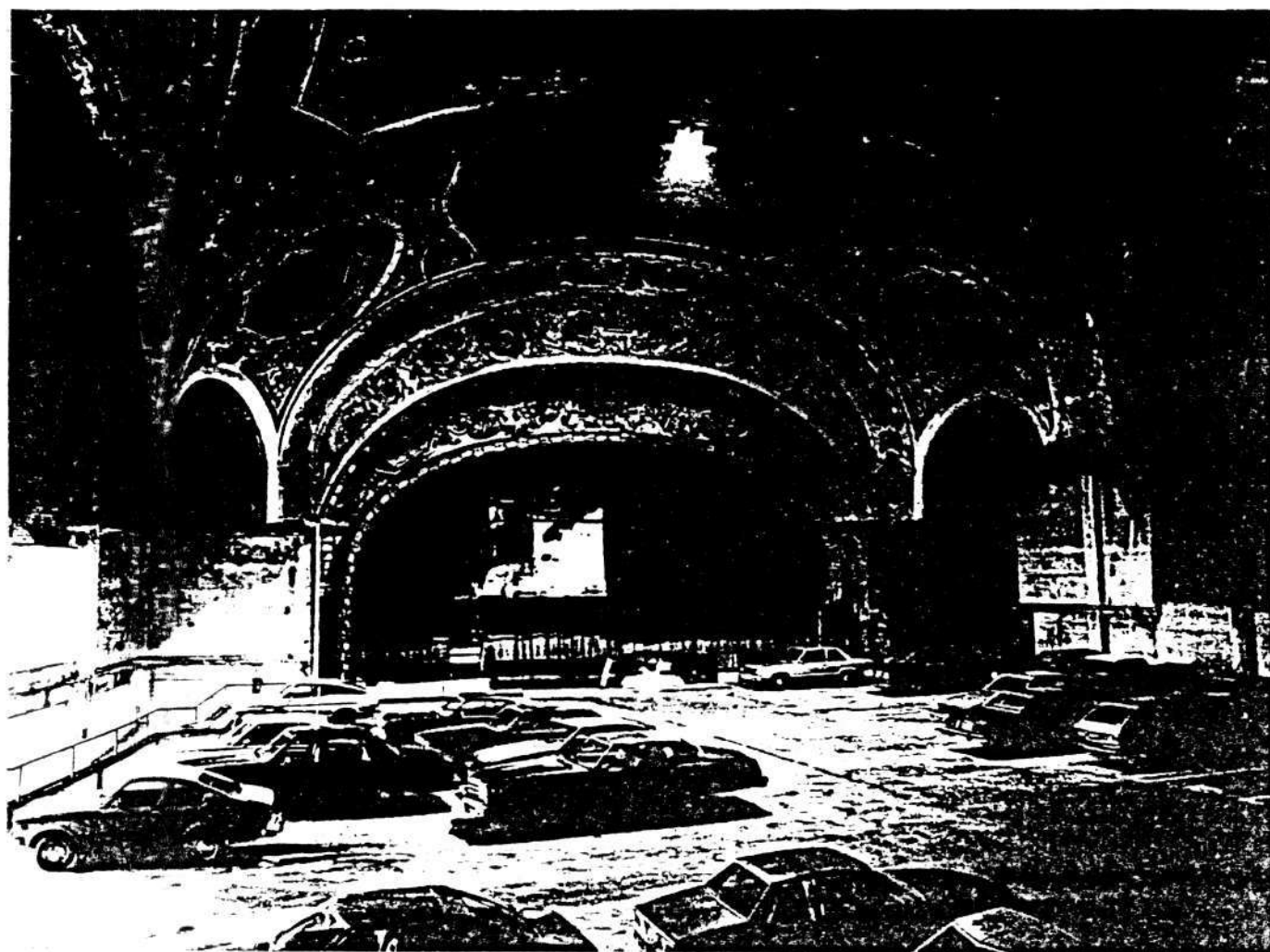
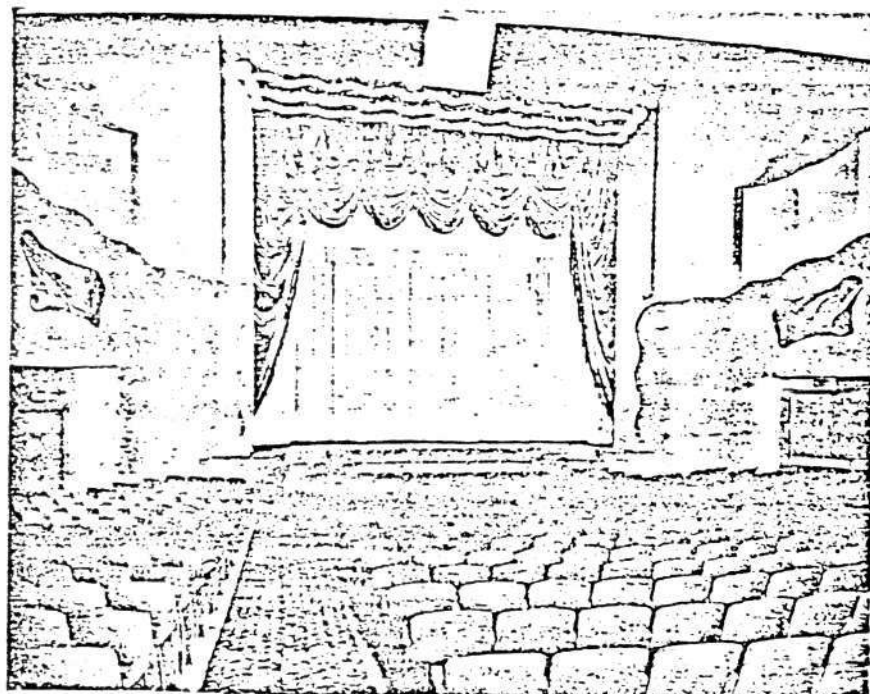


FIGURE 4

A theater (not the Town) converted to garage use.



From: Exit, A History of Movies in
Baltimore

FIGURE 5

REAL ESTATE DEALS AND BUILDING NEWS SUN

AUG 28 1937
Palace Theater Sold To Be

Replaced By Triple-Ramp

Theater Garage Bldg.

Title to the Palace Theater, 309 West Fayette street, including furniture and fixtures, was conveyed yesterday by the Palace Theater Realty Company to the Schroeder Holding Company, Inc. Stamps on the deed filed at the Land Record Office indicated a consideration of \$87,500 in fee. The theater will be razed and replaced by a triple-ramp garage, work to start in the immediate future, according to a recent announcement. B. Howard Richards, Inc. was the broker in the transaction.

From: Baltimore Sun, August
28, 1937



Town Theatre B-2352
311-317 West Fayette Street
Market Center - Metrocenter Survey
Baltimore (City), Maryland
Photo: Janet Davis
March 1986
Neg. loc.: Maryland Historical Trust
Detail, north elevation

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

B-2352

666 632

MAgi #0423525724

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

1 NAME

HISTORIC

The Empire

AND/OR COMMON

The Town Theatre

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

311-17 W. Fayette Street

CITY, TOWN

Baltimore

___ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Maryland

COUNTY

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☒ DISTRICT
☒ BUILDING(S)
☐ STRUCTURE
☐ SITE
☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☐ PUBLIC
☒ PRIVATE
☐ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS
☐ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED
☐ UNOCCUPIED
☐ WORK IN PROGRESS
☒ ACCESSIBLE
☒ YES: RESTRICTED
☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED
☐ NO

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE ☐ MUSEUM
☐ COMMERCIAL ☐ PARK
☒ EDUCATIONAL ☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE
☒ ENTERTAINMENT ☐ RELIGIOUS
☐ GOVERNMENT ☐ SCIENTIFIC
☐ INDUSTRIAL ☐ TRANSPORTATION
☐ MILITARY ☐ OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Telephone #:

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

___ VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Records Office Room 601

Liber #:

Folio #:

STREET & NUMBER

Baltimore City Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Baltimore

STATE

Maryland 21202

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

City of Baltimore Neighborhood Survey

DATE

1976

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☒ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

COMMISSION FOR HISTORICAL &
ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION

CITY, TOWN

Room 900

STATE

26 South Calvert St.

Baltimore, Md. 21202

7 DESCRIPTION**CONDITION**

☒ EXCELLENT
☒ GOOD
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED
☐ RUINS
☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☒ UNALTERED
☐ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The three story high marble facade of this building is modeled in a theatrical Beaux-Arts style. The pedimented central bay of the facade is flanked on either side by projecting wings. All detail is symmetrically arranged across the front.

The three bays of the ground level are defined by heavily rusticated piers. End bays are filled with masonry and are equipped with glass cases for showbills. The central bay is divided into seven parts, with apsidal box office in the middle, with three glass doors, a wall for showbills, and finally two glass doors arranged symmetrically on either side. Corrugated unpainted metal and glass are the predominant materials used.

The marquee, which probably dates from about 1947, covers the entrance area. It is a semicircular contraption with chrome verticals stepping down from a middle high point, in Art Deco fashion. Its colors are red, gold and chrome. Balustraded balconies run at the side bays at the level of the marquee. The massive balustrade is supported by two huge acanthus brackets with suspended wreaths.

Above the marquee, the marble ashlar walls run behind a screen of four engaged rusticated columns with Ionic capitals. Rusticated pilasters are set perpendicular to these against the projecting side bays. Above, a flat frieze supports a broken cornice with vertical striations; it rests above rows of egg and dart; dentil and leaf moldings. The flattened pediment above has a round arched blind window set near the crown. A string of medallions runs near the top of the pediment to reach a carved tablet at the peak, which has a round-arched head. It is carved with festoons, swags, and a cartouche with crossed palms.

On the side bays above the balconies the walls are rusticated with projecting courses of stone set with rows of medallions. Blind masonry doorways are centered behind the balconies. Above, blind windows are framed between Ionic pilasters. Flat stone sills are supported on carved masks. The flat lintels skirt the bottom edge of the frieze, and raised panels set in the frieze above the windows are set with medallions. The cornice breaks above to surround blind bull's-eyes filled with black marble, which is framed by a carved swag of fruit and berries. Keystones above rise to the top of the parapet.

The side walls are entirely of brick with no fenestration; an expressive cascading fire escape with iron rails and ribbed tin roof runs down the eastern side.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES **1911**BUILDER/ARCHITECT **OTTO SIMONSON**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Town opened as a vaudeville house and was designed by the architect of the Paca-Pratt Building (NW corner of Paca and Pratt Streets). The elaborate marble facade is the original, however the interior has been redesigned, after the building served a stint as a parking garage in the 1940's.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE

COUNTY

STATE

COUNTY

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Planning Assistants

ORGANIZATION

COMMISSION FOR HISTORICAL &
ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION

DATE

1976

STREET & NUMBER

Room 900

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

26 South Calvert St.
Baltimore, Md 21202

STATE

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Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 267-1438

B-2352

Empire Theatre (Town Theater, Palace Theatre)

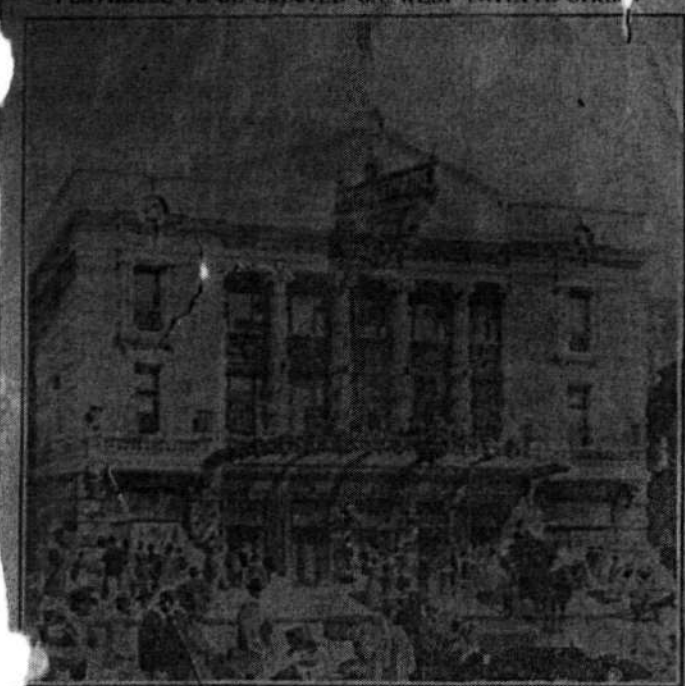
311-317 W. Fayette Street, Baltimore

Accessed 12/15/2009 via

http://mdhistory.net/msaref07/bc_ba_atlases_1876_1915/html/bc_ba_atlases_1876_1915-0371.html

THE SUN, BALTIMORE, FRIDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 18, 1910.

PLAYHOUSE TO BE ERECTED ON WEST FAYETTE STREET



ENRICHES ART WORLD

LASTERS Mural For Courthouse Another City Treasure

MASTERPIECES IN BIG BUILDING

Works Adorning Public Walls In Baltimore Among The Most Famous In Existence.

When the mural decorations in the Courthouse Court by John Paul Lemaire, the famous French artist, are completed in a few weeks, another chapter will be added to the art history of this city.

For there is this country, it has, one of the most rich and varied decorations of any city in the world. The Courthouse Court, now being placed in, is one of the most famous in the world. The artist, John Paul Lemaire, the son of the artist, is the artist of the world. The artist, John Paul Lemaire, the son of the artist, is the artist of the world. The artist, John Paul Lemaire, the son of the artist, is the artist of the world.

CHURCH'S S

Prof. Macintosh Awakening

HE PRAISES SA

Declaration That I Accomplished

Then in Korea

The Baptist Church meeting and Sunday School. The completed as their own church, filled the and entered into the union was organized among the best congregations in the city. The church is a new church, introduced by the church, introduced by the church, introduced by the church.

THE PROPOSED EMPIRE THEATRE, ON FAYETTE STREET, NEAR EUTAW ST.

The plans for the new Empire Theatre, to be erected on Fayette street, opposite Ford's Opera House, will be ready in a few days, and contractors will be asked to estimate on the construction. Architects Otto G. Simonson, of Baltimore, and W. H. McElrick, of New York, are preparing the plans.

The structure will be of French style of architecture, with a seating capacity of about 2,000. The main floor will have three large entrances in the front and four exits leading directly to the main side streets. The balcony as well as the gallery will have wide entrance stairs from the Empire Circuit Company, a corporation of the State of Ohio. The latter company and its officers and directors have contributed the majority of the capital required for the enterprise. A small portion of the stock of the Empire Theatre Company has been subscribed for by local people. The representative of the Empire Circuit Company in Baltimore is Mr. George W. Rife, who is also the president of the Empire Theatre Company. Mr. Charles H. Knapp is local counsel for both companies.

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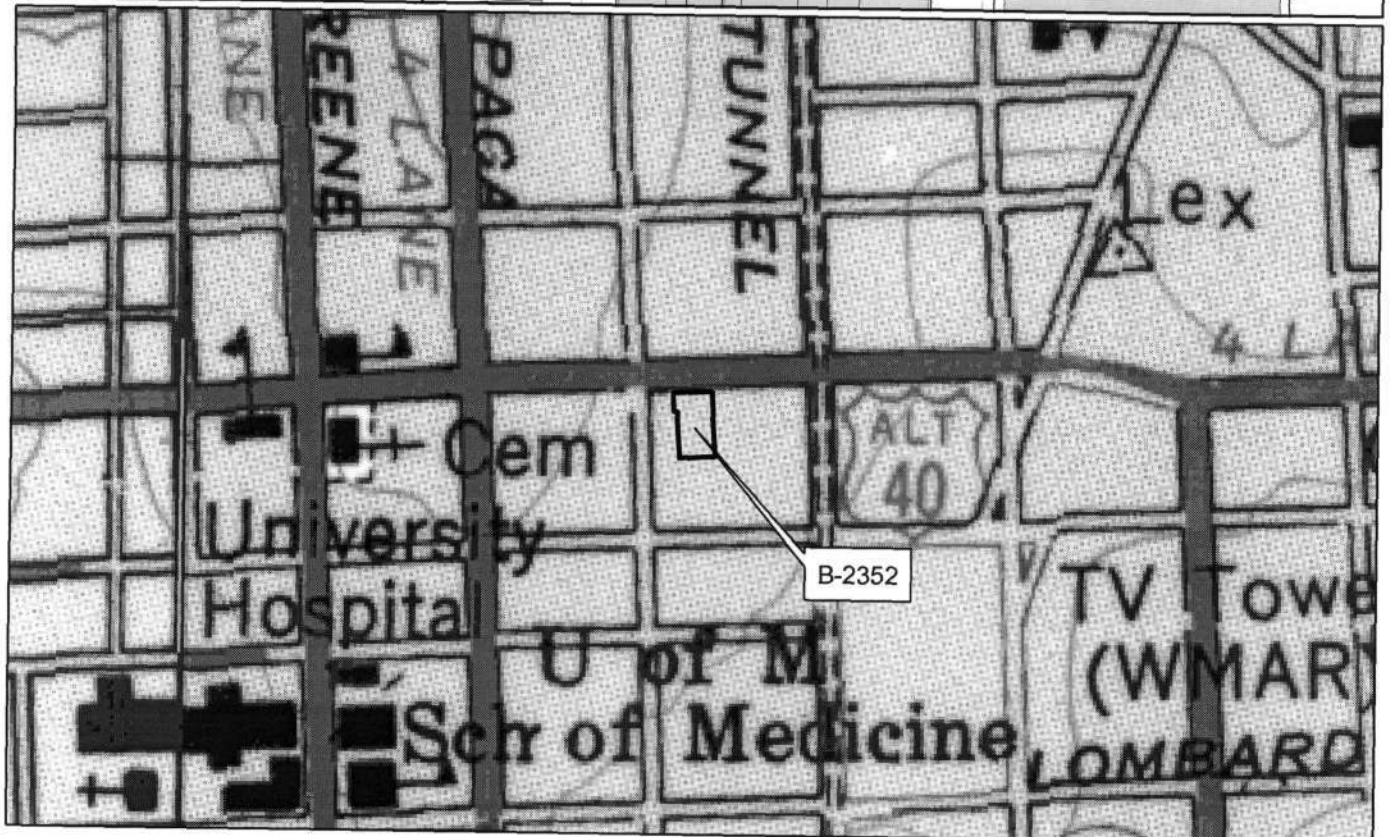
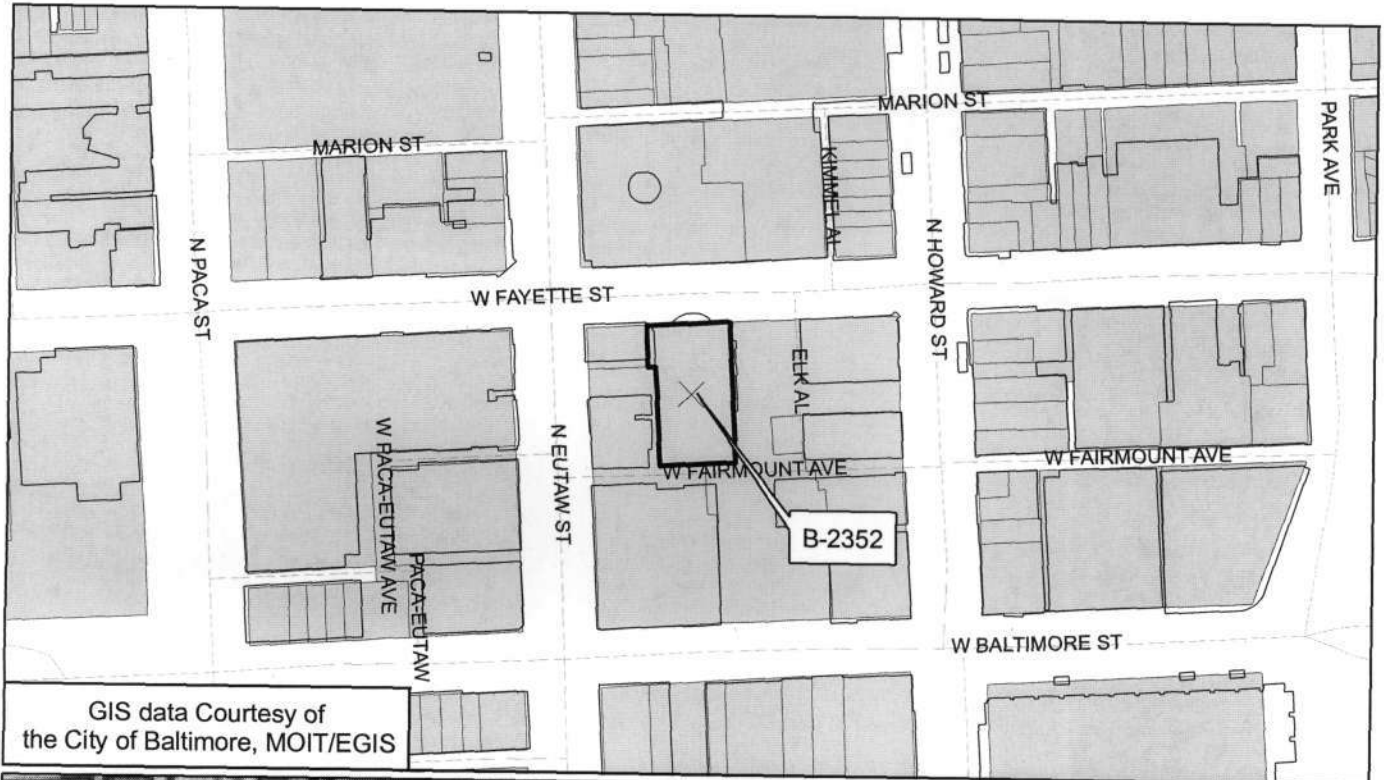
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Eastern and Southwestern is expected to a vote of thanks and greetings.

WESTERN DEATH

B-2352
Empire Theater (Town Theater, Palace Theater)
311-317 W. Fayette Street
Block 632 Lot 004
Baltimore City
Baltimore East Quad.





311-17 W. Fayette

B-2352

Neg #

2/76

B. Pencek

Block

632